The Mystery of Hamlet (3)

Toshio Maeda

(3) Approach to Hamlet through Imagery

3. A Bare Bodkin and the Mobled Queen
The Clothes Imagery

The Ghost appears in the likeness of the king. It is clad in "the very armour he had on / When he the ambitioees Norway combated."

> In the *same figure* like the king that's dead.
> Together with that *fair and warlike form*
> In which the majesty of buried Denmark
> Did sometimes march. (1. 1. 47–9)
> My father's spirit in *arms*? (1. 3. 255)

Thus we see clothes imagery in the Ghost, the only Reality in this play of appearence. But in other characters the same pattern is to be seen. In the beginning of the play, perceiving the shadow of a figure in the darkness of a night, Bernard cries, "Who is there?". Francisco responds to him, "Nay, answer me, stand and unfold yourself." "Unfold is equivalent to unveil a hidden thing", and a clothes image. In *King Lear* Cordelia comments on her sisters' cunning:

> Time shall *unfold* what *plighted* cunning *hides*.
> Who covers faults, at last shame derides. (I. i, 283–4)
> ('plighted' means 'enfolded, pleated')

The word 'unfold' is symbolical of *Hamlet*, for it is a play clothed in a cloud of doubt. Hamlet needs to unfold not only the Ghost, bnt also the King and the Queen, for he must determine the reliability of the Ghost, the guilt of the King and the Queen. The King also tries to unfold Hamlet's transformation, for he is afraid that the young man knows more than he should.

Claudius and Gertrude are proudly arrayed not only literally but also figuratively. They are actually dressed in luxurious furs. But they are gorgeously clothed in quasi-

logical forms—rationalism. Then let us begin with Gertrude.

Gertrude—the mobled queen

We see how gorgeously the Queen is dressed, if we compare her with Hamlet in appearance. Hamlet varies his clothes according to his state of mind. Sometimes he wears an inky cloak in token of his deep grief for his dead father. Sometimes he suddenly appears before Ophelia with his ' doublet unlaced, / No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled, / Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle ' as a sign of being worried by the uncertainty of the Ghost's words. His appearance is of a piece with his reality. But the Queen is not what she seems. She dresses herself in the good-looking semblance. Behold her at the funeral of her husband. Hamlet describes her as she attends it as follows :

> A little month, or e'er those shoes were old
> With which she followed my poor father's body,
> Like Niobe, all tears. (1. 2. 147–9)

' Shoes ' is a clothes image and ' Like Niobe, all tears ' is a play pattern. *Play* is show or action. Action is regarded as the form of a body, and is a kind of clothes. Both patterns belong to the world of ' seeming '. She apparently mourns over her husband's death, letting herself look ' Like Niobe, all tears ' and showing her grief, as She follows her husband's body with ' customary suits of solemn black,' ' windy suspiration of forced breath,' ' the fruitful river in the eye,' ' the dejected 'havior of the visage,' In spite of these '*forms, moods, shapes* of grief, she posts to her incestuous sheets with most wicked speed. Hamlet puts it in apt phrase :

> For they are *actions* that a man might *play*.
> But I have that which within which passeth *show*.
> These but the *trappings* and *suits* of woe. (I. ii, 83–5)

On the contrary, for her Hamlet's ' inky cloak ' is a ' nighted color ', because to the light-hearted a mourning is but a symbol of hell : She advises him to put on a friendly look to Claudius, saying, " Good Hamlet, cast thy *nighted color* off, ... " For her appearance is everything, the only thing to be concerned with. To grieve is outwardly to wear

'the trappings and suits of woe,' never a sign of an inner being. Polonius has something in common with her, for he says, "Costly thy *habit* as thy purse can buy, / But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy, / For the *apparel* oft proclaims the man, ..." (I. iii, 70–72) Polonius is sure that appearance determines the value or an inner character of a man. But Hamlet differs from Polonius: inner man determines the apparel, and appearance is part of the inner Reality, is closely related with it. But to the superficial Gertrude, appearance is a disguise of the inner man, and only a means of concealing her identity. According to Hamlet, the Queen is a player who *assumes actions,* is more rich in words than in matter and brags of ornaments.

They are beggars that can count their worth.

This Juliet's words apply to Gertrude. She is a body without a soul, for she treats love as if it were a quantum and could be expressed in 'a suit of woe.' Love can not be counted, it is a symbol, a quality.

Her concern is with 'seeming', not 'being'. She is a rationalist. The discursive faculty of reason is superficial, never reaches the essence of things. Reality can be penetrated into only by the imaginative faculty of intuition. Not hers is the imagination. Her eyes slide on the surface of things. On the contrary, Hamlet sees things as they are. He looks on the clothes of things with well-armed eyesight till they are transparent. Reality unveils itself before his insight. When he hears his father's death, he stares it in the face. But to his mother, her son's deep grief is a form, a show and a shape. Hence her absurd question rises;

Why *seems* it so particular with thee? (I. ii, 75)

Hamlet's reply to it brings her shallowness into relief;

Seems, madam! Nay, it *is*; I know not '*seems*'. (76)

Thomas Acquinas says, "Sense does not apprehend the essence of things, but only their outward accidents."(1) Gertrude is 'tied to the senses through which' she 'perceives the earth.' She can see nothing but 'all that is.' Invisible reality such as the Ghost is not seen by her eyes. On the contrary, when Hamlet hears of his father's Ghost, he is impatient for the night's coming when he will see it. While the appearance of the Ghost makes his friends look pale with terror, he dares to encounter the Spirit and is

bold enough to follow its beckon. Hamlet's imagination sees the Awful Reality in his 'mind's eye' as he says.

The Ghost is symbolical of the unseen reality in *Hamlet.* It is a touchstone by which the character of a man is decided. The man's character is determined by the way he responds to the Ghost. It is seen only by the imagination. In Gertrude's closet, the Ghost appears again to Hamlet and the Queen. Hamlet sees the spirit and holds discourse with it, but she can not see it.

Hamlet. Do you see nothing there?
Queen. Nothing at all; yet *all that is* I *see.* (III. iv, 132–3)

Far from being aware of the 'essence of things', she attributes Hamlet's 'shaping fantasy' to his madness. To her it seems that Hamlet "bends his eyes on vacancy and holds discourse with the incorporal air."

This is the very coinage of your brain.
This bodiless creation ecstacy is very cunning in. (III. iv, 136–7)

Hamlet deplores the immediacy of her 'lower reason' which, according to Augustine, 'is intent on the disposal of *temporal things.*'(2)

What devil was't
That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?
Eyes without feeling, feeling withous sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope. (III. iv, 136)

We remind ourselves of Hippolyta's words in 'Midsummer Night's Drean,' if we compare Gertrud's madness in reason with Hamlet's reason in madness.

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact. (V. i, 4–8)

Her amorality as well as blindness comes from this lack of imagination. If she were to be virtuous, she would wear the seeming of virtues. Moral is, indeed, a form or a clothes, but not a life. Paul says that by the deeds of the law is the knowledge of sin (The Epistle to the Roman 3. 21). Reason assumes only the clothes of the law, but has not power to realize it. Hamlet urges his mother to 'assume virtue' in vain. But it is natural that a woman of appearance should put on only the seeming of virtue, if she were to be virtuous.

> *Assume* a virtue, if you have it not.
> That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
> Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,
> That to the use of *actions* fair and good.
> He likewise gives a *frock* or *livery*
> That aptly is *put on*. (III. iv, 160–5)

The Queen aptly puts on a frock or livery of deceptive appearence.

Shakespeare is conscious of Gertrude's mantle of respectability. He lays stress on her *seeming* in contradistinction of Hamlet's and Hecuba's *being*. Before her husband dies, she has committed an adultery with her husband's brother. But the King luckily relieved her of the moral problem by dying, and she was able to marry her lover. She took on the mantle of respectability with thankfulness, and never allowed her conscience to prick her. We can see again the same shallow respectability of her nature in her astonishing conduct while the mouse-trap is being presented. She watches it unmoved. By the time the play within the play begins, she has quite forgotten her adultery, though it ended only four months earlier. Knowing nothing of a murder, it never occurs to her that the disloyal Player Queen is intended for her. She never sees herself reproduced in the tale of the unconstant Player Queen. If she were a woman of deep feeling, she would be much affected by the close similarity to her own experience of that of the Player Queen's. But she takes refuge again in the sentimontal respectability. The Player Queen betrays her vow of love, and she herself is a respectable, legally married woman! Nobody is aware of her secret adultery. She apparently has nothing to be ashamed of. Since she is not startled by the proceedings of the play, Hamlet finds himself baffled in the plan in respect of unveiling her guilt, and is forced to ask during the performance:

> Madam, how like you this play?

Her hide is so impenetrably thick that Hamlet's sharp dagger of words gets 'blunted'.

It consists of sentimental decency, benumbed sense and shallow emotion, but it lacks a 'purposed evil'. In this respect Gertrude differs from Claudius. The King dresses up his desire and evil to fit his purpose. But the Queen dresses up the thing done or what has happened to her to fit his shallow respectability. The former contrives to plot evil things. The latter does not 'taint' her soul by contriving against others, nor sacrifices herself for others.

Her hide of semblance always changes like a chameleon. In her husband's funeral she wears 'a suit of sables' which conceals the devil's 'black' as Hamlet says. At the performance of the play she wears a smiling expression on her face, a crown on her head, as if she were expecting a diversion, while the play is presenting an analogy between her and the fickle Player Queen. At the interruption of her happiness by Hamlet's offending Claudius, her mask is at the point of dropping off. Her coarse nature will leap out through the dull hide, assuming the role of an offended mother. She is gentle with Ophelia until the time the girl gets mad. But at the news of Opheliai getting demented, she assumes a coldly indifferent semblance, taking refuge in self-protection, saying "I will not speak with her." (IV. v. 1) When she is told Ophelia's 'mood will needs be pitied' (IV. v. 3), her reaction to it is:

> What would she have?

She does not wish to be disturbed by others' distress. Once Ophelia is dead, the Queen can afford to resume the role of a tender-hearted woman, indulging in rhetoric:

> Sweet to the sweet! Farewell.
> [*Scatters flowers.*]
> I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;
> I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
> And not have strew'd thy grave. (V. i. 266–9)

Like sentimentalists she wishes to be touched by others' suffering, but avoids being involved in the awkward situation of them. The mad Ophelia apprehends the essential things when she is deprived of reason. She looks through Gertrude's impenetrable layer of seeming and perceives her appearance inconsistent with her being. The mad girl distributes flowers to some people. She sets aside some rue for herself, and to Gertrude she gives rue (for sorry memories) with this qualification:

> O, you must *wear* your rue *with a difference.*

Kittredge explains 'with a difference' as follows: "Ophelia means merely that the Queen's cause of sorrow differs from hers, bnt the Queen and the audience feel that the *rue* should mean 'grief' in Ophelia's case, 'repentance for sin' in the Queen's."(3) Grebanier is of the same opinion with Kittredge. He thinks of the difference to be between Gertrude and Ophelia—the sinner and the victim. Both critics are right, but there is one important thing not to be missed. The difference is not only between Gertrude and Ophelia, but also between the outer Gertrude and the inner Gertrude. By the phrase 'with a difference' she means to suggest that the Queen is not what she seems, for her mourning is not symbolical of grief over death. Ophelia, therefore, gives a daisy (for dissembler) to her. The Queen, as an adultress, was not only a dissembler to her first husband, but also is now one to Ophelia and the world.

Gertrude's luxurious fur is contrasted with Hecuba's nakedness. The word 'the mobled queen' lets Hamlet associate Hecuba with Gertrude. But both the queens are not alike. Hecuba is diametrically opposed to Gertrude. If we compare the two queens as they are confronted by their husbands' death, we shall see what a diffesence there is between them, though many critics have failed to notice it. We see Hecuba hurry so as to be in time for her husband's death.

> 'Run *barefoot* up and down, threat'ning the flames
> With bisson *rheum*; a *clout* upon that head.
> Where late the *diadem* stood, and for a *robe*,
> About her lank and all o'erteem'd loins,
> A *blanket* in the alarm of fear caught up— (II. ii, 516–20)

What a conscious contrast is formed! Hecuba's 'barefoot' to Gertrude's 'shoes', 'bission rheum' to 'Niobe's tears', 'a clout' to 'a croron', 'a blanket' to 'a livery or frock'. It is more than an accident. Shakespeare describes Hecuba in contrast with Gertrude. Hecuba runs barefoot to the old Priam, her husband, while Gertrude follows hers with shoes. Hecuba threatens the flames with bisson rheum, as if defying every obstacle destructive to her husband, while Gertrude mourns over her husband's death with 'the fruitful river in the eye', yet is ready to post 'to incestuous sheets' with 'most wicked speed'. Catching a blanket in the alarm of fear, Hecuba puts it on about the lank and all o'erteem'd loins, while Gertrude is solemnly dressed in 'a suit of woe'. Hecuba throws off every sign of respectability to run all but naked to her husband, while Gertrude never forgets to assume a seeming of respectability, dressing herself in a customary suit 'of solemn black' as Hamlet says.

In the presenting of a play Hamlet speaks of his mother with a satire, saying to Ophelia:

Hamlet. ... For look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within's two hours.
Ophelia. Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.
Hamlet. so long? Nay then, let the devil *wear black*, for I'll have a *suit of sables*. (III. ii, 129–134)

Hamlet succeeds in conveying what he intends to mean. 'Sables' is a pun on 'black' and 'luxurious fur' according to the Signet Classic Shakespeare *Hamlet*. Gertrude's 'suit of sables' worn at the funeral of her husband is symbolical both of black devil and hypocrisy or sophistication which a gorgeous array conceals. Shakespeare always tries to relieve one against another. There are two sorts of characters in his plays. This dualism is to be seen in the surroundings about the characters, too. Hamlet, Ophelia, Hecuba are at one pole, Gertrude, Claudius, Polonius, Laertes are at the other pole. *Robe and nakednass* is not a chance product, but a recurrent theme to which all this play never forgets to return.

The clothes pattern is closely interwoven with the play pattern—action and words. Action and word are a kind of clothes and the things which 'a man might play,' as Hamlet says. According to Hamlet, those who are what they seem suit the action to the word, the word to the action, but those who are not what they seem spend 'golden words' and empty their purses and *play* actions. Hamlet defines Polonius as a shaped user of words. Hence his answer to Polonius: "words, words, words." The player who recites the speech from the play on Hecuba is identified with Hecuba, and has 'his whole function suiting / With forms to his conceit.' The player is 'incorps'd and demi-natur'd' with Hecuba, becomes one with Hecuba. Hamlet can not play an avenger of his father's murder. He reproaches himself for being unable to make himself become one with the avenging Hamlet. Hamlet is irritated at not seeming what he is—being no better than the counterfeiter Gertrude or the shape-forger Claudius.

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could *force his soul to his own conceit*
That from her working all his visage wanned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing!
For Hecuba!
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? (II. iii, 560–570)

The play within the play is very important for us to take this drama rightly, Especially the dumb-show is not to be ignored. The fickle Player Queen is Gertrude, and Shakespeare put what is characteristic of Gertrude into the Player Queen. Why did Shakespeare introduce the dumb show into his play? Hamlet's purpose of the scenario is to unkennel Claudius' guilt by making him stagger out in the middle of the performance. But if the performance is interrupted by the King's starting up in the middle of it, how is the audienee to know what in the play strikes the King to the soul? The audience must have a knowledge of the play's plot by means of a brief dumb-show which has the similarity to the Ghost's narrative. This is the chief reason why Shakespeare hit upon the device of a dumb-show as a kind of short cut.(4) But besides this there is another reason not to be neglected. A show in pantomime has not *words* but only *actions*. A dumb-show, therefore, is a series of images of action. Images of a action arouse the imagination in the audience's heart. Words stirs our reason, but images of actions stimulate the imaginative creation. 'Painted words' dress up the speaker's purposed evil in logical form and deceive the hearers. But actions make a straight appeal to the audience's heart and bare the true natures of the actors, for actions are free from 'the forgery of shapes and tricks' which the faculty of words is.

The dumb actions of the disloyal Player Queen are described by such terms as 'show,' 'seem' 'play,' 'action': Let me quote the sentences including such words:

> The Queen kneels and *makes show* of protestation unto him.
> The Queen returns, finds the king dead, and makes passionate *action*.
> The poisoner woos the Queen with gifts; she *seems* harsh awhile, but in the end accepts love. (III. ii, 141)

The forms of '*seems* harsh,' 'makes passionate action,' 'makes show of protestation' are outward actions and nothing but shows or pretenses. Beneath these coverings of pretended actions there lie her true actions which are the reverse of the pretenses. Her actions, therefore, consist of internal and external actions. The outer actions are a garment of a sort in which she clothes her ugly inner ones of desire.

As the Player Queen pretends to fair and good actions, so does Gertrude put on a frock or livery of pretended actions. If the pretended actions are 'made of such penetrable stuff' and not so much 'brazened' by 'damned custom' that Hamlet's words like daggers do not enter into her heart, Hamlet must turn her eyes into her very soul, and make her see that ugly actions which she has done. After killing Polonius in her closet, Hamlet begins to wring her heart. He pours out a torrent of accusations to her and holds a mirror up to the true nature of her actions. But the Queen has the impenetrable hide of pretenses and is 'proof and bulwark against sense.' The example is strongly shown in the next dialogue. Gertrude is shocked to see Hamlet kill Polonius.

Queen. O me, what hast thou done?
Hamlet. Nay, I know not. Is it the king?
Queen. O, what a rash and bloody *deed* is this!
Hamlet. A bloody *deed*—almost as bad, good Mother,
As kill a king, and marry with his brother.
Queen. As kill a king?
Hamlet. Ay, lady, it was my word. (III. iv, 26–38)

Hamlet's bitter words 'a bloody deed—almost as bad, good Mother, / As kill a king, and marry with his brother' draws from her only an incomprehensible cry 'As kill a king?'. Her marriage is thickly covered with a good appearence of order. Her first husband's natural death has enabled her to marry the second husband decently! What is she to blame for?

Hamlet succeeds, however, in ripping off the layer of her seeming. She is face to face with the unbeautiful truth about her deeds, though she protests in self-protectation, saying "What have I done that thou dar'st wag thy tongue / In noise so rude against me?". Hamlet begins to anatomize her deeds actually done.

Such an *act*
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
and sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
As false as dicer's oaths. O such a *deed*
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words; Heaven's face doth glow
O'er this solidity and compound mass
With heated visage, as against the doom
Is thoughtsick at the *act*. (III. iv, 41–52)

Nothing is more unendurable than to see the ugly self:

O Hamlet, speak no more.
Thou turn'st mine eyes ints my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct. (III. iv, 89–92)

O, speak to me no more.
These words like daggers enter in my ears.
No more, sweet Hamlet. (III. iv, 95–97)

Suddenly the Ghost appears, and Hamlet stares at the bodiless vacancy and talks with the airy nothing, pointing out the figure that is not visible to her. Her horror is gone, and she murmurs:

Alas, he's mad! (III. iv, 105)

Everything he has said to her is a wild talking of a madman. God has spared her a bitter task of looking at the true picture of herself. She willingly takes shelter in self-deception by attributing to his madness his knife-like, dreadful words with which she has just begun to be pierced. A dissimulator as she is, she tries to find the best form of action for her unbeautifeel deeds which Hamlet has revealed to her. She covers her uncertain position with a cloak of good manners which conceals a fraud. Assuming the role of a compassionate mother who is concerned about her poor son, she assures herself that every violent word he has said is a product of madness. In this closet scene as well as in the mousetrap scene we see the absence of reflective power and self-censure in this sentimental woman. The consistency of her character is to be noticed throughout the play. She has fled to hide herself in the mask of undisturbed self-complacency, ascribing Hamlet's seeing the Ghost to his lunacy:

This is the very coinage of your brain.
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in. (III. iv, 138–140)

Hamlet loses his temper at her deceiving her conscience with the application of soothing ointment.

Ecstacy?
My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time
And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
That I have uttered. Bring me to the test,
And I the matter will reword, which madness
Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace,

Lay not the *flattering unction to your soul,*
That not your *tresspass* but my *madness speaks.*
It will but *skin* and *film* the ulcerous place
While rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen. (III. iv, 140–150)

According to Webster's third New International Dictionary, 'unction' means 1b(1): the anointing of the sick with oil that is a religious rite of healing and 3a: the application of a soothing or lubricating oil or ointment b: something that is used for anointing: ointment, unguent ‹bought an unction of a mountebank—Shak.› c: something that soothes or eases ‹lay not the flattering~to your soul—Shak.› Two examples using the word are quoted from *Hamlet,* and one of them is the phrase at issue. Every meaning of the word is to ease a sick person of pain by putting a deceptive ointment on the surface of his wound. We see a meaning more aptly expressed in Webster: 4b: exaggerated, *assumed,* or *superficial* earnestness of language or manner: Unctuosness. In the New Webster Dictionary of the American Language, too, the same meaning is to be found: 5. a quality or manner of utterance characterized by a mere *pretense* or affectation of fervor, etc., or by unctuosity. Both meanings have something to do with a clothes image and an action (or play) image.

Gertrude makes a smooth pretense of motherly compassion to persuade herself wrongly or to defraud her 'sick soul' of pain by superficial anointment. When she utters a cry of anguish again to Hamlet's torrents of accusations, she places herself on a top of security and blinding herself to the true nature of what she has done:

O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain. (III. iv, 157)

Many critics regard this word of Gertrude's as a token of repentance. Among them are the great Bradley and Granville-Barker included. Bradley says "When Hamlet shows her what she has done she feels genuine remorse. It is true, Hamlet fears it will not last, and so at the end of the interview (III. iv, 180 ff.) he adds a warning that, if she betrays him, he will ruin herself as well. It is true too that there is no sign of her obeying Hamlet in breaking off her most intimate connection with the King. Still she does feel remorse;"(5) Granville-Barker, too, thinks of Gertrude as a repentant woman. He refers to the state of her mind after the Ghost disappears, saying "The mystic moment past, his compassion, truly, is as bitter as his wrath. To him bitterer; for he has no faith, he finds in her repentance."(6) Judging from this statement, Granville-Barker has taken her later cry of anguish for the second token of repentance. According to New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: Hamlet, Seymour, too, explains this word of hers to be 'a compunction at her misconduct and a sense of her duty.'(7)

Most critics and readers never entertain a doubt as to the interpretation above that contrition rends her heart. But Grebanier and Eleanor Prosser raise objections against this. Grebanier works his clear way through confusions of explanations:

> O Hamlet, thou has cleft my heart in twain. (III. iv, 156)

she weeps, and he imagines that her heart is broken to see how vile she has been. What she means, however, is that her mother-heart is cracked to witness how far gone is her poor son's mental sickness. As she wrings over her plight, she has inwardly returned to her hitherto-undisturbed self-complacency."[8] Mentioning Grebanier as of the same opinion as hers, Eleanor Prosser, too, ascribes the later cry of anguish to "her pain at what has happened to her son rather than a confession of guilt."[9] I am sure that these two critics are right, for clothes imagery proves that her heart has turned to a garment without sense or blood. The object of 'cleave' is 'club,' 'apple,' 'crown,' 'pine,' 'lemon,' etc., in other plecys of Shakespeare. They are hard /, non-living things or fruit without sense. Like '*an apple, cleft in two*' (Twelfth Night, V. i, 230), or 'thy crown' which 'thou clovest in the middele (King Lear, I. iv, 175), Gertrude's heart has had the sense eaten by the 'monster custom' 'Of *habits* devil' and turned to a stone. Regarding her heart as a 'habit' (costume), Hamlet commands her to divest herself of one mask and to wear another:

> O, throw away the worser part of it,
> And live the purer with the other half.
> Good might—but go not to my uncle's bed.
> *Assume* a virtue, if you have it not.
> The monster *custom*, who all sense doth eat,
> Of *habits deril*, is angel yet in this,
> That to the use of *actions* fair and good
> He likewise gives *a frock* or *liuery*
> That aptly is *put on*. (III. iv, 158-166)

The pretence has become reality by cusom. The pretense of actions foul and bad has given her heart a suit of sables or trappings which is aptly put on. Her heart has become a suit of woe by bad habit. There is no way of her soul's salvation except by stripping her heart of the black mantle and investing it with another 'russet' one. Action imagery and clothes imagery are closely combined in these lines of Hamlet. They are reminiscent of one line of Hamlet's glorification of man.

in *action* how *like an angel!* (II. ii, 15)

This line has been interpreted as the praise of man's action. Hamlet's use of images however, indicates the reverse of it: Man looks one thing, but is another.

The end of Gertrude is inevrtably caused by the same superficial, assumed action of hers. During the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes she assumes the role of tender mother and takes sheter in her histrionic egotism, she wipes the sweaty brow of Hamlet with her handkerchief and drinks the fortune of her son:

He's fat, and scant of breath.
Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows.
The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet. (V. ii, 288–290)

She never takes the trouble to go beneath the surface, and drinks the poisoned drink unknowingly. "The cannonading is particularly associated with the 'rouses' (or carouses) of Claudius, his pledging of toasts and drinking of healths. The sound effects which accompany the 'rouse' are carefully enumerated by the king just before the fencing match:"(10)

Give me the cups,
And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
The cannons to the heavens, the heaven to earth,
"Now the King drinks to Hamlet." (V. ii, 275–79)

Gertrude has something in common with Claudius in fondness of ostentation. The latter embelishes his plot with showy effects of theatrical art to deceive or dazzle others' eyes. The former covers herself with histrionic display and unctuous, motherly feeling to blind her eyes to the true nature of the King's 'foul play.' The difference lies between the deception of others and the satisfaction of one's own vanity. As she never doubted any foul poison in the death of her first husband, so does she never doubt any foul poison in the drink which is prepared for Hamlet. She shows a tendency to avoid what lies beneath the superficial in this last play of a fencing match as before the beginning of the play.

In this last scene of the play we are reminded of Edgar's word:

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us:

Not only Gertrude, but Claudius and Laertes are punished by their own vices. Laertes lays his unction to the unbuttoned point of his sword and plays a part in the contrived play of Claudius.' '*Unbated, envenomed,*' the treacherous instrument turns itself on its practicer. He dies from his own poison. Ill-equipped, covered with 'flattering unction,' Gertrude's soul betrays her possessor to ruin. She, too, dies from the poisoned drink which her blindness fails to perceive. Claudius is destroyed by his own device which he has shaped to fit his evil purpose. He has his own poisoned drink forced down his throat by Hamlet. Overdressed, man falls. This is an irony of this play.

References

(1) Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.Q.LVII., A.1. (translated by Fathers of the English Do minican Province) (Chichago, 1952) Vol. I, p. 295.
(2) Ibid., I.Q.LXXIX., A.9. Vol. I, p. 422.
(3) G.L. Kittredge, *Hamlet* (Boston, 1939) p. 265.
(4) B. Grebanier, *The Heart of Hamlet* (New York, 1967), p. 227.
(5) A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1967) p. 167.
(6) H. Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare, Hamlet* (London, 1968), p. 230.
(7) H.H. Furness, *Hamlet* (New York, 1963), Vol. I, p. 301.
(8) B. Grebanier, op. cit., p. 273.
(9) E. Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge* (California, 1971), p. 198.
(10) M. Charney, *Style in Hamlet* (New Jersey, 1969), p. 17.